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FM AMEMBASSY BUCHAREST
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7644
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L BUCHAREST 001304

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/25/2017
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [RO](#)
SUBJECT: APATHY GETS BIGGEST VOTE SHARE IN ROMANIAN
ELECTIONS

REF: BUCHAREST 1296

Classified By: Political Counselor Ted Tanoue for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Less than 30 percent of registered voters bothered to vote in European Parliament (EP) elections held on November 25, with an even smaller number of voters participating in a referendum called by President Basescu on implementing a uninominal voting system in Romania. With 85 percent of votes counted, it appears only five parties will have representation in the European Parliament, including the governing PNL and UDMR and the opposition PD, PSD, and PLD. Independent candidate Laszlo Tokes also secured an EP seat. The biggest upset losers included the right-extremist parties PRM and PNG (although Gigi Becali's PNG remains just shy of the 5 percent threshold). While all the major political parties have claimed victory, President Basescu's effort to leverage the referendum to increase the PD's vote share fell short of the mark. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) On the morning of November 26, the Central Electoral Bureau released a partial vote tally based on 85 percent of the votes. The two major opposition parties finished first and second, with the Democratic Party (PD) winning around 29 percent of votes, followed by the Social-Democratic Party (PSD) with 22 percent. The governing National-Liberal Party (PNL) received 13 percent, and the Democratic Union of Hungarians from Romania (UDMR) just barely made the 5 percent threshold with slightly less than 6 percent of the vote. The election also saw a good showing by the breakaway pro-Basescu Liberal-Democratic Party, which received around 8 percent of the votes. Independent Magyar candidate Laszlo Tokes garnered 3.63 percent (passing the 2.8 percent threshold for independent candidates). The biggest losers appear to be the two extremist parties: Corneliu Vadim Tudor's Greater Romania Party (PRM) which received only 4.15 percent of votes and Gigi Becali's New Generation Party (PNG) with 4.87 percent. Other parties that failed to make the cut include Dan Voiculescu's Conservative Party, which received 2.82 percent of votes counted.

¶3. (SBU) Basescu's referendum vote on electoral reforms saw only 25.52 percent of voters participating, far below the 50 percent plus one threshold for a valid referendum vote. However, more than 80 percent of those who did vote said "yes" to the referendum. Major political leaders, including PM Calin Popescu-Tariceanu and former President Ion Iliescu, ostentatiously boycotted the referendum and urged voters to do the same. President Basescu in a public statement November 25 expressed his disappointment in the referendum results, noting that the low turnout should be taken as a "lesson" not just for the whole political class, but for himself as well.

Basescu acknowledged that he had not taken sufficient time to explain the intricacies of the proposed electoral reform package to the public. He also cast opprobrium on other political leaders for their "irresponsible" calls to boycott the referendum.

¶4. (SBU) All the parties are in the process of assessing their electoral performances and of taking the necessary measures for improved scores in the upcoming local and national elections. The election is noteworthy in that, for the first time in Romania's post-communist history, the PSD has been is dethroned as the largest single party, receiving its lowest electoral vote share since 1990. PSD president Mircea Geoana acknowledged that the party's target was higher, but he spun the election results as being a "relatively good" performance. PSD emeritus president Ion Iliescu, on the contrary, blamed the party leadership for the low score and called for an extraordinary party convention to discuss how the PSD should respond to the election results.

¶5. (SBU) Basescu's Democratic Party garnered the largest share of the votes as predicted. However, the PD's vote share came up short of the 40 percent anticipated by some PD leaders before the election. PD leaders have already announced that the local PD organizations that underperformed--e.g., brought in votes under the national average--will be "held responsible". The PNL also claimed victory, although the party fell short of the objective of obtaining a vote share close to what it received in the 2007 parliamentary election (20 pc). Prime Minister Tariceanu's position as party leader does not seem in danger, but analysts predict a cabinet reshuffle in coming weeks to replace some of the more controversial ministers, including possibly the Foreign Minister, Interior Minister, and Justice Minister.

¶6. (SBU) Despite bitter infighting, both the mainstream UDMR

and the radical Hungarian factions around Bishop Laszlo Tokes appear to have crossed their respective electoral thresholds. This is rather paradoxical, given the low turnout and the shrinking ethnic Hungarian community in Romania. The good scores can however be explained by the high level of discipline in the Hungarian community and success of the UDMR and Tokes' supporters in bringing out the ethnic Hungarian vote in disproportionate numbers. The counties with the largest population of ethnic Hungarians (Harghita and Covasna) recorded high turnout levels (around 45 pc). With its fate also riding on the election results, the breakaway Liberal-Democratic Party (PLD) ran an aggressive election campaign, and has succeeded in joining the winners' circle.

¶7. (SBU) The mood is completely different at the headquarters of the two parliamentary parties which failed to cross the electoral threshold. For the PC, the electoral score did not come as a surprise, given the legal difficulties now being faced by party head Dan Voiculescu and the party's low standing in the polls. The Greater Romania Party, however, responded to its electoral upset by blaming the USG for stealing the election in cahoots with Basescu; PRM leader Corneliu Vadim Tudor dramatically announced that he would resign from the parliament. Vadim called on other PRM parliamentarians to resign as well, but some of have announced that they would not do so. It remains to be seen whether any of them act on their word.

¶8. (C) Comment: As noted reftel, the low voter turnout was not unexpected. With the exception of the drubbing received by the right-extremist parties and the PC, every party could with some justification claim a certain measure of victory. The PD can now claim that it has overtaken the PSD as the pre-eminent political party. The PSD can claim that, with 22 percent of the vote, it has arrested its downward slide and is now on the mend. Similarly, the PNL stayed afloat despite a recent series of scandals, underperforming ministers, and the defection of party dissidents to form the PLD. The PLD for its part now becomes a real party, having crossed the 5

percent threshold. Finally, the UDMR can claim rightly that it has survived its near-death experience and remains above the 5 percent mark, at least for now. What came somewhat as a surprise was the public indifference to Basescu's referendum vote, and the fact that it probably did not increase the PD's vote share as expected. Lack of long political coat-tails on Basescu's part, and the surprisingly strong performance of rival pro-Basescu PLD will no doubt be worrisome to many PD leaders. What remains to be seen is the second-order fallout from Sunday's vote, including whether PM Tariceanu now feels strong enough to continue leading a hyper-minority government, or whether he will succumb to the blandishments of the PSD in forming an oil-and-water coalition. End Comment.
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